

# THE SENIOR TIMES

## COVID-safe Musique Actuelle Festival kicks off in Victoriaville May 21



Michel Levasseur

**IRWIN BLOCK** MAY 16, 2021

Many of the 70 musicians who will be performing in 12 concerts over three days were slated to appear last May when organizers had to cancel the event, which has been an annual and anticipated feature of the music scene here since 1983. In previous years the festival offered some 20 concerts over four days.

The festival has achieved a word-wide reputation as a showcase for a broad range of exploratory and creative music from avant jazz and electronica to avant rock, Noise, Metal, and improvised music. Performances by major innovators such as saxophonists Anthony Braxton, John Zorn and his entourage, Evan Parker, pianist Cecil Taylor, guitarist Nels Cline, and bassist William Parker have contributed to the festival's international reputation.

Since the Canadian border with the U.S. remains closed and travel from elsewhere is severely limited – mainly due to the 14-day quarantine requirement for visitors – this year's lineup will not include American, European and other international artists. All but three of the musicians live in Quebec.

While it's an all-Canadian lineup, Michel Levasseur, the festival's veteran general manager and artistic director, says it's totally in the spirit of the Victoriaville tradition, diversified and international in flavor.

### Highlights

— Jerusalem-born **Ayelet Rose Gottlieb**, an innovative singer and composer who lives in Montreal, opens the festival at **5:30 p.m.** leading a sextet that includes electric guitarist Bernard Falaise in an eclectic program reflecting Middle Eastern and Western influences.

— At **7:30 p.m.** electric guitarist **René Lussier**, a festival veteran whose performances have helped build its avant-rock foundation, returns with drummer Robbie Kuster, turntablist Martin Tétrault, and sound sculptor Érick d'Orion on electronica.

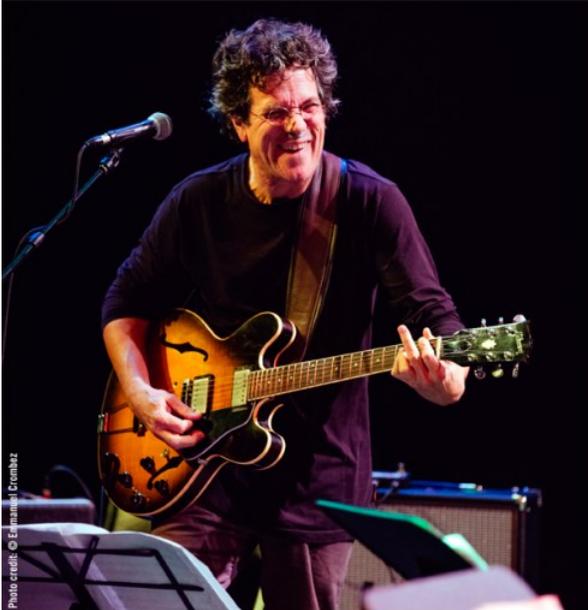
— **Saturday at 7:30 p.m.** the 14-member Growlers choral ensemble takes the stage, a Montreal-based choir of heavy metal singers, created by composer and musical director Pierre-Luc Sénécal in a program accompanied by prerecorded electronic and percussive sounds. It is believed to be the only choir of its kind.

— **Sunday at 3 p.m.** a double bill opens with Alberta-based singer-songwriter and guitarist Kathleen Yearwood, premiering a 60-minute work called "Requiem (World in Ashes)."

— Another Victo veteran, the gifted electric guitarist Bernard Falaise, follows with his first performance here as a headliner, in a trio with Alberta-based drummer Jean Martin and electric bassist Pierre-Yves Martel.

— **At 5:30 p.m.** on Sunday, Montreal-based Quatuor Bozzini links up with bassist Nicholas Caloia and saxophonist Yves Charuest to play two composed works, capping the concert with a collective improvisation.

— The closer at **7:30 p.m.** is billed as a celebration, the 40th anniversary of musique actuelle trailblazers Ensemble Supermusique, with 12 musicians performing new compositions by Jean Derome, Joane Héту, Danielle Palardy-Roger, and Cléo Palacio-Quintin.



René Lussier



Ayelet Rose Gottlieb

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As in previous years, performances are in three venues – the town’s modern cultural centre downtown, its hockey arena reconfigured into a concert hall, and a 145-year-old Catholic church.

Even as planning for the concerts moves ahead, talks continue with regional public health authorities to ensure spectators and performers are safe.

“It’s been tough with them,” admits Levasseur, discussing his frequent contacts with public health officials since mid-March.

“At first they got really scared by the term ‘festival’,” he recalled. But the team went ahead planning and promoting the concerts without being certain that approval would be granted to open the venues to live performances. Ticket sales began April 21.

Approval was granted for nine mainly outdoor sound installations that will be on display on the town’s main street and nearby green spaces starting May 17. Experimental short films are also being screened on the weekend, and new visual art will be on display in the arena.

A 9:30 p.m. curfew will be in force, meaning the last concert of the day starts at 7:30 p.m. and end by 9 p.m. No alcohol or other drinks will be served and the usual “hang” around the bar at the main hotel – where fans and musicians get to know each other – will not happen.

Spectators will have to wear masks and maintain a two-meter, or 6.5-foot distance in every direction from their neighbours. This means three empty seats between spectators in one row, and no one in the rows in front or behind them. Masks will be handed out to those who don’t have their own.

Musicians who are part of a group also will maintain a minimum 6.5-foot distance with fellow musicians on stage, while masks for them are optional.

In hotels, only those musicians and festival-goers who live at the same address can share a room. Those who reside in areas of Quebec designated as “red” – maximum alert level, including Montreal and Laval – will be allowed to buy take-out from restaurants, while those from “orange” zones that have lower COVID infection rates can make reservations and enjoy a meal at tables inside.

A festival pass with access to all concerts costs \$235 while a festival package including two concerts, and one night with breakfast at Le Victorin Hotel costs \$113 per person.

For the full lineup and other info, click on [fimav.qc.ca](http://fimav.qc.ca) or call **1-819-752-7912**.

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